

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

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U.S. Rejects Nicaragua's Envoy Bid

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The State Department yesterday rejected Nicaragua's nomination of Deputy Foreign Minister Nora Astorga to be its ambassador to the United States because a Nicaraguan general was murdered in her bedroom in 1978.

Nicaraguan officials said no official explanation was given to them in the five-line rejection notice that was delivered to the Foreign Ministry in Managua. But a State Department official said, "The unofficial line is we don't want that assassin here. She's not appropriate."

At the same time, President Reagan's former special envoy to Central America, Richard B. Stone, called on Reagan to take a personal role in building support in Congress for his policies in the region.

"You can't conduct a foreign policy with Congress largely against you," Stone said at a luncheon with Washington Post editors and reporters.

What is needed now, he said, is a major effort to build bipartisan support for

U.S. aid to the government of El Salvador and for the administration's tough policy toward nearby Nicaragua. Stone recommended "an informal presidential effort" of meetings with moderate members of Congress, beginning with House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dante B. Fascell (D-Fla.), and with other chief congressional actors in the Central America debate.

"I'd use the White House and I'd use Camp David, everything there is, to make the effort," Stone said. He said he is confident that agreement is possible despite adverse Capitol Hill reaction to Reagan's charges that Congress is undercutting his policies.

"It has to be done," said Stone, who resigned last month because of personality and turf conflicts in the State Department. "I think the president is uniquely fitted for this if he'll make the effort."

Astorga, 36, who was chosen by Nicaragua's Sandinista government to be its ambassador here, is an articulate, energetic attorney who was prominent in the revolutionary army of the Sandinista National Liberation Front that ousted dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979.

She has acknowledged that in March, 1978, when she was working in secret for the Sandinistas, she invited Gen. Reynaldo Perez Vega, one of Somoza's key officers, to her bedroom, where five Sandinistas were waiting in hiding to kidnap him. She has said that the general resisted and was killed in the ensuing struggle.

In an extraordinary series of leaks when Astorga was nominated by the Sandinistas a month ago, CIA officials let it be known that the general, who was deputy commander of Somoza's National Guard, had been cooperating with them and that they resented his loss and harbored a grudge against Astorga.

A month of argument ensued within the Reagan administration over whether the general's death was sufficient reason to reject an otherwise qualified nominee to be ambassador here, State Department officials said. One official, who played down any CIA influence on the decision, said, "She's just not a candidate likely to advance prospects for meaningful dialogue between the two countries."

"We never even thought about that [murder] as a possible issue," said a Nicaraguan Embassy official here. He said the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, Anthony C.E. Quainton, had met Monday in Managua with Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Tinoco and urged that Astorga's nomination be withdrawn. The State Department official said there had been several previous meetings with the same purpose.

The request was rejected "because she's qualified and we hoped she would improve our communications here," the embassy official said. A mother of four, Astorga has served as chief of administrative affairs in the Foreign Ministry and of accounting for the army, and headed courts that tried former Somoza officials on political charges. The official added that Quainton had said that the U.S. decision on Astorga "would be made at the highest level."

The Nicaraguan government last night charged that the United States is "reasserting its unyielding, aggressive and confrontational policy."

Astorga would have replaced Antonio Jarquin as Nicaragua's ambassador, but he now will remain in Washington, the embassy official said. He added that Nicaragua has no plans to alter its pre-

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